

Paramount Theatre  
2025 Broadway  
Oakland  
Alameda County  
California

HABS No. CA-1976

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20243

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. CA-1976

## PARAMOUNT THEATRE

Location: 2025 Broadway, Oakland, Alameda County, California,  
between 20th and 21st (formerly Hobart) Streets.

USGS Oakland West Quadrangle, Universal Transverse  
Mercator Coordinates: 10.564560.4184800

Present Owner: City of Oakland, California.

Present Occupant: Paramount Theatre of the Arts.

Present Use: Performing arts center.

Statement of  
Significance: The Paramount Theatre is one of the finest remain-  
ing examples of Art Deco design in the United  
States. It was one of the first Depression-era  
buildings to incorporate and integrate the work  
of numerous creative artists into its architecture  
and is particularly note-worthy for its successful  
orchestration of the various artistic disciplines  
into an original and harmonious whole. The theatre  
was painstakingly restored in 1973 and was entered  
in the National Register of Historic Places on  
August 14th of that year. On May 5, 1977, the  
Paramount Theatre was declared a National Historic  
Landmark.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The construction drawings are dated October 2, 1930. The ground-breaking took place on December 11, 1930, and the theatre opened on December 16, 1931. The original cost was approximately \$3,000,000.
2. Architect: The architectural firm of J. R. Miller and T. L. Pflueger had overall responsibility for the Paramount Theatre, but Timothy L. Pflueger was primarily responsible for its design. James R. Miller was a member of Miller & Pflueger from 1910 to 1917 and between 1920 and 1937 and was associated with Pflueger in the design of the firm's principal buildings during those years. He was elected to the old San Francisco Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in

1916 and served as its Secretary for a number of years. He continued a member of the Northern California Chapter of the A.I.A. until his death on August 2, 1946.

Timothy L. Pflueger, the architect of the Paramount Theatre, was born in San Francisco in 1892, studied architecture at the Beaux Arts Institute of Design in his native city, and joined Miller in 1910. After World War I, during which he was connected with Federal construction in various cities, he resumed practice in the firm of Miller & Pflueger in 1920. The partnership was dissolved in 1937, after which Pflueger headed Timothy L. Pflueger and Associates until his death from a heart attack on November 20, 1946. The firm continues under Timothy Pflueger's brother as Milton T. Pflueger and Associates.

The firm of Miller and Pflueger had become well-known for Pflueger's remarkably avant-garde San Francisco skyscrapers by 1930, when the Paramount Theatre was commissioned for Oakland. His 26-story Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company Building of 1925 was the first West Coast building of any stature to exhibit the coming trend away from traditional ornament and was one of the first in the nation. The 29-story Medical and Dental Building at 450 Sutter Street, with its undulating vertical rhythm and delicately patterned texture was even more revolutionary, for it presaged the modern curtain wall. Pflueger's San Francisco Stock Exchange, now the Pacific Coast Stock Exchange, opened on January 4, 1930, and is notable for its staircase mural by Diego Rivera and monumental exterior sculpture by Ralph Stackpole, as well as for the ceiling grille below the trading room skylight.

Both of those 1930 buildings had much in common with the Paramount Theatre. The Mayan-inspired patterning of the exterior and lobby of the 450 Sutter Street Medical Building clearly prefigured the reliefs on the Paramount's auditorium walls, although the latter are not specifically Mayan, and the grillework that is so characteristic a feature of the Paramount's interiors was first used in the Stock Exchange. (Grillework of that kind was apparently used in only one other building, the El Rey Theatre in San Francisco.)

Timothy Pflueger's distinguished career continued after the building of the Paramount Theatre, in spite of the almost total suspension of building activity during the

Great Depression. Governor James Rolph, Jr. appointed him chairman of the board of consulting architects on the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge project. During the 1930s, the Golden Gate International Exposition of 1939-1940 was designed by a board of architects of which Pflueger was one of the five members. The Court of Pacifica, the California State Building, and the Fine Arts Exhibition including Art in Action were designed by Timothy Pflueger, and his Federal Building was described as the "most imaginative of modern architectural ventures" at either the Golden Gate International Exposition or the New York World's Fair of the same years.

Among Pflueger's later works were the Patent Leather Lounge, or Orchid Room, in the St. Francis Hotel and the Top of the Mark in the Mark Hopkins Hotel. Both were completed in 1939. The former was notable for its molded Lucite translucent ceiling, and the latter is famous for the panoramic views of San Francisco that it commands. The Union Square Plaza and Garage of 1942, another of Pflueger's innovative San Francisco works, was the first underground garage of its kind, and the I. Magnin & Co. store facing Union Square Park, one of four Magnin stores by the firm, was designed before Pflueger died in 1946. As a designer of theatres, Timothy Pflueger was not notably prolific. He was responsible for only eight entirely new theatres, including the Paramount, and remodelled eight others. Among those theatres, however, are some of the finest in California. In addition to the Paramount, the Castro and Alhambra in San Francisco and the Alameda in Alameda are particularly noteworthy. The extremely specialized field of theatre architecture usually involves architects known for little else, but in Pflueger's case the reverse is true. Until the restoration of the Paramount, Timothy Pflueger's theatres, in spite of their high quality, were the least-known portion of his work.

A timely juxtaposition of events lay behind Pflueger's concept for the Paramount Theatre. First, there was the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes of 1925 in Paris, which promulgated the contemporary style that so appealed to Pflueger. That style, now commonly called "Art Deco," has been variously termed "Art Moderne," "modern," and, sometimes invidiously, "modernistic." Pflueger himself did not attend the Paris exposition, nor did he choose to call his personal interpretation of the new style either "Moderne" or "Art Deco." While he gleaned ideas from

publications, particularly from the annual Decorative Art: The Studio Year-Book, his Paramount Theatre has a unity of style remarkable for any building, especially one conceived when novelty was the current rage. It is "moderne" only in the sense that it owes little to any past style, and it is not characterized by the abstract, geometric manner commonly associated with "Art Deco." Because it relies less on conventional "Art Deco" mannerisms than most buildings of its era, the Paramount now seems less dated than most of its contemporaries.

The unique personal quality of Pflueger's work poses a problem of stylistic definition. The term "Art Deco," which gained its present currency following the exhibition held at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris from March 3 through May 16, 1966, seems the most logical choice, although, as just noted, the Paramount Theatre is not a conventional example of the Art Deco manner. (The title of the 1966 exhibition catalogue, Les Années "25" -- Art Déco/Bauhaus/Stijl/Espirit Nouveau, heralded the return of the term "Art Deco" to current usage.) The continuing tendency to lump "Art Deco" and "Art Moderne" together as "modern" seems inappropriate where applied art and ornament exist, since "modern" was used to denote the strictly astylar work of the Functionalist school. "Art Moderne," "Moderne," and plain "modern" are best reserved for much plainer and sterner buildings than the Paramount Theatre.

From 1916 until the Oakland Paramount was projected by Publix Theatres, the exhibiting arm of Paramount Pictures, theatres in the Publix chain and its corporate predecessors had been designed, mostly in a lavish Baroque manner, by the Chicago firm of Rapp & Rapp headed by C. W. Rapp (died 1926) and George L. Rapp (1878-1941). The choice of Miller and Pflueger over Rapp & Rapp may possibly have been influenced by a moving picture film of the Paris exposition of 1925 that had been taken and shown in the film community by Anthony B. Heinsbergen, a Netherlands-born Hollywood-based prolific designer of theatre interiors. Certainly, a predilection for a fresh approach to design was evidenced by the decision to employ Pflueger.

The Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes of 1925 was only one factor contributing to the genesis of the Paramount Theatre design. The thriving renaissance of the fine arts in the Bay Region provided Pflueger with an unusually gifted

pool of talent upon which to draw. Even more significant was the architect's enthusiastic appreciation of art and his ability to select his sources judiciously and interpret them creatively. His sensitive understanding of the creative process enabled him to synthesize the work of various artists into a consistently harmonious and elegant whole. Although Pflueger, described as a "rough nugget" by his staff, allowed his designers "free-wheeling research within the avant-garde" according to a former staff member, Michael A. Goodman, he nevertheless deftly controlled the final result.

Timothy Pflueger was credited by one professional journal as "responsible for the work of more sculptors and mural painters in his buildings than any other western architect." (Architect and Engineer, June 1941, p. 19) He engaged the most famous muralist of the time, the Mexican Diego Rivera (1886-1957), to paint "The Wealth of California" for the San Francisco Stock Exchange, and Rivera later identified Pflueger's most original concept as his use of the fine arts in his buildings. "The group he gathered about him achieved a success in expressing their individual vision of American Society in a harmony which included the architectonics of the building." (Rivera, My Art, My Life) Pflueger and Rivera were boon companions during the latter's stay in San Francisco, and while Rivera was not directly responsible for the facade mosaic of the Paramount Theatre, his influence may be seen in the majestic monumentality of the two figures in it as well as in its use of earth colors.

Pflueger was an active participant in the artistic life of the Bay Region not only through his notable patronage of artists but also through his service as a member of the Board of Directors of the San Francisco Art Association from 1930 until his death. Between 1932 and 1937, he served as President of the Association. He was, of course, a member of the Northern California Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Since Timothy L. Pflueger's death in 1946, the firm has been headed by his brother, Milton T. Pflueger, A.I.A. The still-active firm, now styled Milton T. Pflueger and Associates, served as consultant during the restoration of the Paramount Theatre in 1973.

3. Artists and designers: Theodore Bernardi (1903- ) served as director of the artistic program for Miller and Pflueger on the Paramount Theatre project. A former designer for the architect John Galen Howard, he was active in the early 1930s in the Civil Works Administration in San Francisco and was a District Officer for the Historic American Buildings Survey. In 1945 he became a partner in the architectural firm of Wurster, Bernardi, and Emmons.

Charles Stafford Duncan (1892-1952) painted the mural in the basement women's smoking room of the theatre. A painter and printmaker, Duncan was born in Hutchinson, Kansas, studied at the Mark Hopkins Institute, now the California Institute of Fine Arts, and was a member of the San Francisco Art Association, the California Society of Etchers, and the Bohemian Club. Duncan's awards included the SFAA Gold Medal and the Bohemian Club's James D. Phelan Prize in 1927, the SFAA's Anne Bremmer Prize and the Pacific Southwest Exposition's Gold Medal in 1928, and the California Palace of the Legion of Honor's William L. Gerstle Prize in 1930. He died in New York City in 1952 at the age of 59.

Gerald Fitzgerald designed the cartoons from which the mosaics on the facade of the Paramount Theatre were made and was also the designer of the "fountain of light," the large (almost 35-foot-high) illuminated carved glass composition that is the principal decorative feature of the entrance end of the grand lobby. It was from Fitzgerald's preliminary designs that Robert Boardman Howard prepared the bas-relief sculptural panels of the auditorium, and Fitzgerald was also responsible for the grand lobby and auditorium ceiling designs. He studied architecture at the University of California at Berkeley and was a member of the Miller and Pflueger staff until the late 1930s. He served as an office consultant on the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge project and was referred to by Pflueger as "a brilliant young artist." Data on his career after his leaving the Pflueger firm have not been found.

Michael A. Goodman (1903- ) drew and painted the design of the grand drape, a deep valance of hard stretched velvet. He also served as an "idea-man" for the architects and artists working with Bernardi on the Paramount Theatre project. Goodman was born in Lithuania and joined the faculty of the University of California at Berkeley in 1927. An artist, architect, and city planner,

he had received the San Francisco Art Association Gold Medal in 1925 and the American Graphic Artists Society Award in 1930 as well as other prizes before the Paramount was planned. Goodman formed his own architectural firm in 1934 and was made a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 1945, the year he was appointed Professor of Architecture at the University of California, where he designed several of the Berkeley campus buildings. In 1970 he received the Berkeley Citation for distinguished achievement and notable service to the University of California. Since 1973 he has been Professor Emeritus and Research Architect at the University.

Robert Boardman Howard (1896- ) executed the incised decorative reliefs (called sgraffito-work by Pflueger) for the auditorium walls and, with Ralph Stackpole, for the proscenium ceiling panel. Howard, a noted sculptor and muralist in later years, adapted the mold-making technique he had used for making relief maps during U. S. military service in France during 1918-1919 for his Paramount Theatre work. He won the San Francisco Art Association First Medal for Sculpture in 1937, 1941, 1943, and 1944, and his work is represented in a number of leading museums, including the Museum of Modern Art. A member of the California Society of Mural Artists, Howard worked with Pflueger on both murals and sculpture for the San Francisco Stock Exchange. He continues to reside in the San Francisco area.

Dorothy Wright Liebes (1899-1972) was special consultant to Timothy Pflueger for the textiles, including the stage curtains, used in the Paramount Theatre. She was then on the threshold of her long and distinguished career in textile design. After designing the appliquéd gold and silver pattern of the house curtain, among other things, for the Paramount, she worked with Pflueger again in 1939, when she designed the white silk ceiling-to-floor draperies for his Patent Leather Lounge in the St. Francis Hotel. California-born Dorothy Liebes numbered Frank Lloyd Wright, Edward Durrell Stone, and King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia among her international clients, and her commissions ranged from the Persian Room of the Plaza Hotel in New York to the main lounge of the S. S. Constitution. She specialized in custom-designed hand-loomed textiles, not infrequently combining metallic yarns with silk and cotton. Her textiles formed an integral component of the architectural settings in which they were used, and her influence raised the craft of weaving to the status of an art.



Milton T. Pflueger, A.I.A., Timothy Pflueger's brother, worked with Theodore Bernardi in designing work, including human and animal figures for the facade mosaic, and interior details. He also assisted Bernardi in directing the work of other artists. He joined Miller and Pflueger in the late 1920s and upon his brother's death in 1946 became head of the firm, then Timothy L. Pflueger and Associates. Milton Pflueger continues to head the firm, now Milton T. Pflueger and Associates, and was a consultant to Skidmore, Owings & Merrill during the restoration of the theatre in 1973.

Ralph Stackpole (1885-1974) was the sculptor primarily responsible for the proscenium ceiling panel on which Robert Boardman Howard also worked. A noted sculptor, and also a painter, Stackpole was born in Williams, Oregon, and entered the California School of Fine Arts in 1901. In 1906-07, he studied under Antoine Mercier at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and in 1911 he studied painting under Robert Henri in New York. After a second European stay in 1922-23, he returned to teach at the California School of Fine Arts for nearly twenty years. In 1930 he did the sculpture for Pflueger's San Francisco Stock Exchange, and in 1938-39 he again worked with Pflueger, when he created monumental sculpture for the Golden Gate International Exposition. In 1949 he settled in Puy-de-Dôme, his French wife's native province, where he died in 1974. Ralph Stackpole's major artistic interest was the integration of monumental sculpture with architecture.

4. Original and subsequent owners: Construction was initiated by Publix Theatres, the exhibiting organization of Paramount Pictures. Financial difficulties forced the sale of the uncompleted building to Fox-West Coast Theatres, the firm that completed the theatre and operated it until it closed on September 15, 1970, although the name "Paramount" was ultimately retained. In 1972 the building was purchased by the Board of Directors of the Oakland Symphony Orchestra Association. During 1973 the building was restored, and in 1975 the City of Oakland, the present owner, assumed ownership from the Oakland Symphony Orchestra Association.
5. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The San Francisco firm of Wagner and Martinez (George B. Wagner and Adrien Martinez) was the contractor, with the following subcontractors and suppliers. Unless otherwise noted, all were San Francisco firms.

Alexander Smith, Inc., Greensboro, NC (carpets)  
 August Dakert & Co. (ornamental cast plastering)  
 Capitol Art Metal Co., Inc. (sheet metal work - ceilings,  
 marquee)  
 Dahlstrom Metallic Door Co., Los Angeles, CA (misc. iron)  
 E. K. Wood Lumber Co., Oakland, CA (lumber)  
 Frank Adam Electric Co. (electrical equipment)  
 Gladding, McBean & Co. (tile facade & interior tile)  
 Heywood Wakefield, Gardner, MA (auditorium seating)  
 J. H. Pinkerton Co. (sprinkler system)  
 Johns-Manville Corp. (acoustical treatment)  
 Ketcham & Rothschild, Chicago, IL (lounge furniture from  
 Pflueger's designs)  
 Michel & Pfeffer Iron Works (ornamental metal)  
 Pacific Manufacturing Co. (millwork)  
 Pacific Portland Cement Co. (cement)  
 Parafine Companies (roofing)  
 Peter Clark, Inc., New York, NY (stage equipment)  
 Rudolph Wurlitzer Manufacturing Co., North Tonawanda, NY  
 (organ)  
 Santa Cruz Portland Cement Co. (cement)  
 Soule Steel Co. (reinforcing steel & steel pans)  
 Sunset Lumber Co., Oakland, CA (lumber)  
 Thomas Day Co. (lighting fixtures)  
 Vermont Marble Co. (marble)  
 W. & J. Sloane (carpets)  
 Wayland Co. (acoustical treatment)  
 Wieland Sheet Metal Co. (sheet metal work - ceilings, etc.)  
 William J. Forster Co. (vacuum cleaning system)

6. Original plans: Although the original tracings have not been found, the original blueprints of sheets 1 - 33 are on file in the office of Milton T. Pflueger and Associates, 580 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94104. A description of the proposed building issued by Miller and Pflueger is quoted in full in Part I, D below.
7. Alterations and additions: No significant structural changes have been made. The original rectangular marquee was replaced by the present triangular marquee at an undetermined date. Wider seating was installed and 18 spaces for wheel-chairs were provided during the 1973 restoration. There are now 1714 orchestra seats and 1284 balcony seats, making 2998 in all, or 436 fewer seats than there were originally. The air-conditioning system was modernized, bars were installed on both orchestra and mezzanine levels, and a box office was added at the 21st Street entrance in 1973. The original "Publix I" Wurlitzer organ, the last of its kind to be built, had been removed before the theatre

closed in 1970. During the 1960s it was bought by Ken's Melody Inn, Los Altos, CA, where it remains. The organ was being replaced by "one of the greatest instruments ever realized" in 1974. (Front Row Center, Vol. I, No. 1, Sept.-Oct., 1974)

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The Paramount Theatre in Oakland was one of only three theatres built by the Publix chain on the West Coast and was the last one started in a construction program which began in 1925. It was not only the last Publix house but was also the last very large moving picture theatre built on the West Coast and is now the largest of the type still extant there. The ground-breaking ceremony was performed with a golden spade by E. B. Field, President of the Oakland Chamber of Commerce, on December 11, 1930. Speeches by Paramount and municipal officials, including Commissioner George H. Wilhelm representing Mayor John L. Davie, who was ill, and music by the ROTC Band and the Oakland Firemen's Band marked the occasion.

During construction, Fox-West Coast Theatres took control from the financially distressed Publix chain. On December 16, 1931, a year and five days after the ground-breaking, the theatre was opened with all the fanfare that had become customary. A late afternoon luncheon at the Hotel Leamington preceded the dedication ceremony at the theatre. At 5:00 p.m. on a streetside bandstand, President C. J. Struble of the Oakland Chamber of Commerce dedicated the theatre to the East Bay public, a trust accepted by Oakland Mayor Fred. N. Mordom. Arch M. Bowles's pledge of community service, made on behalf of Fox-West Coast Theatres, was followed by speeches by members of the Hollywood contingent, director Howard Sheehan, and stars George Bancroft, John Brendon, Elissa Landi, and Frances Dee.

Kay Francis, star of the opening film, "The False Madonna," and cast members Conway Tearle, Charles D. Brown, Marjorie Bateson, and William Boyd (not yet known as Hopalong Cassidy) were in attendance. A stage show on a Russian theme titled "Slavique Idea" was accompanied by the 16-piece orchestra under Lou Kislloff, and variety acts by Fanchon and Marco, the Seven Arconis, Breck and Thompson, Patsy Marr, and Sam Hearn made up the rest of the program. The audience at the 9:00 p.m. repeat performance was spared the speeches. The sounds of both programs were broadcast to a throng estimated at 10,000 that crowded the roped-off street in front of the flood-lit theatre. Theatre officials apparently succeeded in their announced intention to produce a first night to "rival in magnificence and splendor any similar opening on the Pacific Coast."

Some six months after the auspicious opening, the Fox-West Coast chain encountered difficulties arising from the anti-trust laws. By 1933, a group including Spyros Skouras and Joseph Schenck took over most Fox interests. For a number of years the theatre operated successfully, but by the 1960s attendance diminished, and the house went dark when subway construction reached its vicinity in 1967. As the 1970s began, the theatre was operating only one day a month, just enough to retain its franchise. By 1972, the National General Corporation, the theatrical realty firm then owning the building was discreetly seeking a buyer. A brief episode as a setting for scenes in Warner Brothers' "The Candidate" starring Robert Redford showed little of the theatre but drew some attention to it.

In that same year, 1972, the Historic American Buildings Survey, aware that the building was vulnerable, initiated steps to record it. At about the same time, quite independently of any other actions, the Oakland architect and preservationist Marshall McDonald suggested to certain interested people that the dormant theatre might very well serve as Oakland's much-needed concert hall and performing arts center. A test performance in the Paramount led by Oakland Symphony Orchestra Conductor Harold Farbman demonstrated that the theatre's acoustics are excellent, and the Board of Directors of the Symphony Orchestra Association purchased the building for \$1,000,000, one half of which was donated by Edgar F. Kaiser and Stephen D. Bechtal. The National General Corporation, with magnanimous civic loyalty, contributed the remaining half.

As the Paris exposition of 1925 effectively launched the style now called "Art Deco" and thus lay behind certain concepts adopted by Pflueger in designing the Paramount, so also the timely revival of interest in the style played a significant role in the restoration of the theatre. Time, "distilling its essence," as Professor Michael A. Goodman put it, had made the once "modern" historic and the "historic" up-to-date. In October-November 1970 Elayne Varian mounted an exhibition titled "Art Deco" at the Finch College Museum of Art in New York City. That was followed in 1971 by a very large July-September Art Deco exhibition at the Minneapolis Institute of Art. The catalog of the latter show contained the "first definitive bibliography" of the subject. A third exhibition, "Movie Palace Modern," held at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., in December 1971-January 1972, illustrated the work of Anthony B. Heinsbergen and was, of

course, directly related to picture theatre architecture. Wide press coverage of those exhibitions heightened general public awareness of Art Deco and theatre architecture.

Most of the ninety-three members of the Oakland Symphony Orchestra Association Board of Directors favored retaining the original 1931 decorative treatment of the theatre as a setting for the orchestra, but some members doubted the practicality of that course of action. They conceded, however, that they would vote for retention, if they could be persuaded to do so within twenty-four hours. Steven Levin, President of the Theatre Historical Society, appealed to the Historic American Buildings Survey for a persuasive statement of significance to be sent overnight to Jack Bethards, member of the orchestra and of the restoration committee.

The Survey responded to the crisis by sending a night letter of about 440 words over the signature of Chief John Poppeliers that mentioned HABS Writer/Editor Lucy Pope Wheeler's preparation of a HABS photo-data book for publication and emphasized the significance of Pflueger's interpretation of the spirit of the 1925 exposition. The wire also cited recent exhibitions of the style and Elayne Varian's plea for preservation, quoting a fragment of her January 1973 Art Gallery Magazine article as follows:

The stability and grandeur of Art Deco architecture was the product of careful planning that resulted in totally harmonious units. All the artists, architects, painters, sculptors, and designers were commissioned at the inception of each building and worked together to create a synthesis that involved every last detail of the external and internal structure.

With the telephoned assistance of Mrs. Varian, then in Florida, and the editor of Art Gallery Magazine in Connecticut, a copy of the issue containing the Varian article, which was published that day, was located and rushed by special messenger to Jack Bethards in time for the 2:00 p.m. meeting of the full board on December 30, 1972. The night letter from HABS and the copy of the magazine were duly presented, and no further objection to retaining and restoring the original decorative treatment of the Paramount Theatre was made.

The restoration was made possible by a great number of people. Joe W. Knowland, Vice-President and General Manager of the Oakland Tribune, and Mrs. Knowland, an active Bay Area civic and cultural leader, headed the campaign to raise \$3,000,000

above the \$1,000,000 purchase price already contributed. One million was designated for the restoration, renovation, and refurbishment of the building, and the other \$2,000,000 were to be for an endowment to provide operating funds for the Paramount Theatre of the Performing Arts. A group of sixty Bay Area leaders formed an Advisory Board to operate the five campaign divisions. Mr. and Mrs. Knowland key-noted the campaign by stating that:

The success of the Paramount's rebirth will be watched by communities throughout the nation. Many are faced with making the decision we did in the Bay Area: whether to preserve an irreplaceable theatre and its historical significance or to pay the price of building a new cultural arts center.

The architects for the restoration and new construction were Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, San Francisco in consultation with Milton T. Pflueger, brother of the original architect. M. W. Garing was the contractor for the new work. Architecture Plus, March-April 1974, listed the following suppliers on page 133:

SCAFFOLDING: Patent Scaffolding.  
SEATING: American Seating Company.  
UPHOLSTERY FABRICS: Piedmont Plush Mills, Franciscan Fabrics, Inc.  
CARPETS: Montasco Co., Alexander Smith, Angelus Carpets, Heskett's Carpet Coliseum.  
AUDITORIUM FLOORS: Swinerton & Walberg Co.  
ORCHESTRA SHELL: Stagecraft.  
ACOUSTICS: The Sono-Ceil Co.  
GLASS & TILE: Oakland Terrazzo, Newell Tile.  
AIR CONDITIONING: Commercial Air Conditioning, Air Filter Sales & Service.  
CURTAINS AND DRAPES: Marvin C. Burkman.  
AWNINGS: Brampton Co.  
ALARM SYSTEM: American District Telegraph.  
FIRE ESCAPE: Eandi Metal Works.  
PLUMBING: Champion's Plumbing & Heating  
SPRINKLER SYSTEM: Grinnel Co.  
MARQUEE: Modern Neon.  
NEW FURNITURE: Pacific Woodworking Co.  
COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM: Swanson Sound Service Co.  
ROOFING: Star Roofing Co., Western Roofing.  
STAGE LIGHTING EQUIPMENT: Holzmuehler Corp., Kliegl Brothers.  
STAGE EQUIPMENT: United Studios.  
CONCRETE: Kaiser Sand & Gravel.

MASONRY: Pete Paletta, Inc.  
REINFORCING STEEL: Allied Steel.  
MISCELLANEOUS IRON: Eandi Metal Works, Inc.  
HOLLOW METAL: Forderer Cornice Works.  
SHEET METAL: Apollo Heating & Sheet Metal Co., Inc.  
MILLWORK: Union Build-In Fixtures.  
GYPSUM DRYWALL: Larry Larson Drywall, Inc.  
ROLL-UP DOORS: The Cookson Company.

The restoration, including general refurbishment, new seating, modernized air conditioning, the 21st Street box office, renewed and reproduced furnishings, and reproductions of the original carpets and upholstery, continued until the theatre reopened as the Paramount Theatre of the Arts on September 22, 1973. On August 14, 1973, the Paramount was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. On August 26, 1975, the Oakland City Council voted unanimously to accept ownership of the theatre, provided it was debt-free by September 30, 1975. The Symphony Association planned to liquidate the outstanding \$800,000 debt, incurred by the refurbishing and restoration, by that date through private donations. The City Council agreed to absorb an annual operating deficit of not more than \$180,000 and voted certain controls and restrictions. The agreement allowed the Oakland Symphony Orchestra priority for 98 annual dates (40 for concerts and 58 for rehearsals) rent-free for forty years. On May 5, 1977, the Paramount Theatre was declared a National Historic Landmark by the Secretary of the Interior. In addition to its primary use for symphony concerts and films, the theatre is used by ballet and ethnic dance groups, jazz groups, lecturers, and popular singers. The grand lobby is used for business meetings, luncheons, parties, and wedding receptions, and conducted tours of the entire building are frequently scheduled.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Original architectural drawings: The original drawings for the Paramount Theatre are missing, but photocopies of 33 original blueprints, seven of which (including 3 plans, 1 section, and 3 details of walls and a ceiling), recopied for this HABS photo-data set, were lent to HABS by Milton T. Pflueger Associates, 580 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94104. Two redrawn floor plans were published in Motion Picture Herald, March 12, 1932, pp. 15-16. Photocopies are included in this report.
2. Old views: Thirteen views (2 exterior and 11 interior) taken in 1932 by Gabriel Moulin Studios, San Francisco, were lent to HABS by Milton T. Pflueger Associates and

copied for this report. One view by Starrett (showing mosaic assembly) was lent by Milton T. Pflueger Associates and copied for this report.

3. Interviews: The following persons, consulted in person or by telephone, some of them on several occasions, supplied information for this report:

Rita Androsko, Dir., Div. of Textiles, Museum of History and Technology, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; William C. Bendig, Ed.-in-Chief, The Art Gallery Magazine, Ivoryton, CT; Brother Andrew Corsini, Ed., Marquee, Theatre Historical Society of America, Notre Dame, IN; Susan Cosgrove, Librarian, American Institute of Architects, Washington, DC; Luana Devol, Public Relations, Dir., Paramount Theatre of the Arts, Oakland, CA; Ellen Dietschy, Ed., Paramount on Parade, Oakland CA; Dr. John Douglas Forbes, U. of VA, Charlottesville, VA; Helen Gee, Alameda County Recorder's Office, Oakland, CA; Prof. Emeritus Michael A. Goodman, U. of CA, Berkeley, CA; Terry Helgesen, Los Angeles, CA; Ralph Higbee, Dorothy Liebes Design, Inc., New York, NY; Robert Boardman Howard, San Francisco, CA; Steven Levin, Pres., Theatre Historical Soc'y, San Francisco, CA; Marshall W. McDonald, Salem, MA; A. Craig Morrison, Detroit, MI; Harry Mulford, Anne Bremer Memorial Library, San Francisco Art Inst., CA; Paul N. Perrot, Museum of History and Technology, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; John Pflueger and Milton T. Pflueger, San Francisco, CA; M. B. Roller, Phoenix-Day Co., Lighting Fixtures, San Francisco, CA; Elayne Varian, Finch College Museum of Art, New York, NY.

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D. Supplemental Material:

The following description of "Theatre - Oakland - California" was issued by J. R. Miller & T. L. Pflueger, Architects. Cubage of the building was given as approximately 2,760,000 cubic feet.

A complete theatre building located on southerly portion of main part of lot and extending full 50' wide to Broadway and with secondary exit and stage entrance units to Hobart /now 21st/ Street and passages from courts to 20th and Hobart /21st/ Streets.

It shall be of strictly fireproof class "A" construction with steel frame and concrete walls, built in accordance with all city, county, state laws or regulations and to obtain for insurance purposes the lowest rate of insurance for a theatre granted by the National or Local Board of Underwriters.

The building contains an Auditorium, seating approximately 3500 persons, complete with orchestra foyer /projected seating total was 3528; actual original seating was 3434; mezzanine lounge and foyer, upper connecting foyer, ramp, stairs, etc; grand lobby directly behind vestibule and outer lobby connects at same level with orchestra foyer and with mezzanine foyer by two grand stairways; public toilets and lounging facilities of ample size both in basement and mezzanine; stage complete with gridiron, switchboard, twelve dressing rooms, storage space, shops and accommodations for orchestra, organist, stage hands, etc.; organ lofts complete and wired for installation of organs; general basement containing machinery space and accommodations for ushers, janitors and other help; office suite for managers, treasurer, cashier, publicity men, etc., on mezzanine; projection booth complete with non-synchronous room, rewind room, battery room, rheostat room, generator room etc.

Design of entire interior shall be in a restrained modern treatment with special lighting and surface effects.

Broadway street front of building complete with vestibule, ticket booth, marquise (except advertising signs), frame for large vertical sign, etc., shall be in the form of a tower flanking the main sign and full width of lot for the major part of its height. It shall also be designed in modern style and built of ornamental non-corrosive weather resisting materials.

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All units shall be adequately ventilated and heated where necessary. Ventilating system in general shall be of overhead distribution re-circulating type with air, spray washed, heated or cooled to maintain a temperature of 70 degrees. City steam shall be used for steam supply.

Provision shall be made for adequately lighting the entire interior and exterior of the building. Auditorium, grand lobby and mezzanine foyer shall have provisions for special diffused lighting effects.

The theatre has a frontage of fifty feet on Broadway. The theatre is entered through a grand lobby, this approximately 50' wide, 50' high and 80' long, which is entered directly from the vestibule fronting on Broadway. /The actual interior width of the grand lobby is about 40'./ This lobby will be finished in elaborate materials, marble mirrors and extensive lighting effects. From this lobby, the grand stairway leads to the mezzanine foyer. Further stairways also lead to upper foyer levels, all of which extend the full width of the theatre at the rear of same. The foyer for the orchestra floor is also entered directly from the end of this lobby and is 18' wide by the full width of the orchestra.

The theatre is of the type called by Gillespie "De Luxe". It has a total seating capacity of 3528 seats /3434 as built/, of which 2268 /2126 as built/ are on the first or orchestra floor, 312 /324 as built/ in the balcony loge section and 948 /984 as built/ in the balance of the balcony.

The theatre is to be equipped with a full stage for de luxe productions.

The theatre will have no mezzanine loge seats, it being planned for the showing of the future large size motion picture productions now being developed.

There will be no posts on the orchestra floor, the balcony being supported on a girder which extends from outer wall to outer wall.

Prepared by Lucy Pope Wheeler  
HABS Writer/Editor  
1976

and

Denys Peter Myers  
HABS Architectural Historian  
1980

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## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Paramount Theatre facade is composed of a monumentally-scaled mosaic bisected by a sign above a simple marquee-sheltered entrance. All the elements of the design, entrance, marquee, mosaic, and sign, form an integrated whole and are treated in a restrained Art Deco manner. The mosaic represents a pair of immense static figures manipulating puppets. The rich interiors, a creative orchestration of various artistic disciplines, interpret the Art Deco manner with great originality. The use of indirectly illuminated metal-grille ceilings to form "canopies of light" in both grand lobby and auditorium, the incised bas-relief auditorium wall sculptures, the "columns of light" flanking the proscenium, and the glass "fountain of light" in the grand lobby are especially noteworthy examples of the consistently harmonious and successful decorative work throughout the theatre.
2. Condition of fabric: The condition of the fabric is excellent. The building had been basically well-maintained throughout its career as a cinema theatre, and during the restoration in 1973 great care was taken to preserve the original décor. Deteriorated or missing features such as carpets, draperies, and upholstery were reproduced after the original patterns. Except for replacing mechanical equipment, the restoration consisted principally of cleaning and refurbishing. About 60% of the original furniture was still in situ.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The building measures approximately 195' by 300' over-all, and its over-all height is approximately 125' to the top of the sign, which rises approximately 38' above the roof. The building is composed of two principal blocks. The block containing the entrance, or outer vestibule, the inner vestibule, and the grand lobby is some 50' wide and runs west about 100' to join the auditorium and stage block, whose central axis is off-center about 10' to the north. The auditorium and stage block is irregular and asymmetrical in shape. At the east end of the block, the orchestra foyer extends south about 10' beyond the auditorium and north to 21st Street about 55' beyond the auditorium. Both extensions contain staircases and exits, and there are offices above the

first floor of the north extension, which runs about 27' along 21st Street. The auditorium itself is about 130' wide at the east, or foyer, end and tapers to about 110' in width toward the stage end. (The measurements cited refer to exterior dimensions.) The stage end of the auditorium is flanked by lateral extensions about 15' wide containing exit passages and stage property rooms with organ chambers above them. The dressing-room unit extends north approximately an additional 30' to 21st Street, where its elevation is about 48' wide. The rear (west) wall follows a diagonal lot line along Telegraph Avenue, making the stage area wider at the north than at the south end.

Except in the office and dressing-room units, there is no fenestration to give exterior expression to the number of stories. The principal horizontal divisions are a basement (termed "ground floor" by the architect), orchestra level, and balcony with a mezzanine level inserted underneath it. The stage roof is about 90' above grade, and the highest point of the auditorium roof is about 105' above grade.

2. Foundations: The foundations are constructed of reinforced concrete.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The walls are constructed of reinforced concrete. They terminate in parapets concealing the roofs. There are no cornices, the uppermost zone of all walls except the facade being simply finished off by three parallel horizontal striations. Except for the Broadway elevation (the facade) and its returns, the walls are painted pale yellow with broad painted vertical bands of red-brown (corresponding to the maroon glazed tile returns at the Broadway end) at the corners. The name "Paramount" appears in black paint on the Telegraph Avenue (rear, or west) elevation.

Each of the two piers flanking the open entrance vestibule is faced with polished black granite inset with a polished aluminum-framed recessed glazed poster case above which is a circular bas-relief representing geese in flight. The roundels are executed in either aluminum or chromium plate. (Both metals are cited in Pflueger office press releases.) The marquee will be described below. Above the marquee, the elevation is faced with glazed mosaic tile at each side of the vertical sign projecting at a right angle from the center of the wall. (The uppermost

30' or so of the wall rise above the roof to form a parapet.) The tile facing returns around each side for about 13'. The sign will be described below.

The mosaic is composed of two pictorial panels approximately 100' high separated by the projecting sign and bordered at the outer edges by almost 5'-wide bands of five rows of chevron-profiled maroon tiles ascending to a height of over 80'. The left-hand (south) panel represents a maroon-robed male figure frontally posed against a gold background. Behind the head are three green-bordered blue horizontal bands bearing red-orange maroon-bordered gold-rayed five-pointed stars. The hair (or cap) is rendered in maroon, is square-cut across the brow, and bears a blue, green, and red-orange ornament. A maroon collar studded with three red-orange stars connects across the exposed collar-bone area with the robe. The face, neck, and hands are gold, the facial lines being indicated in black. The hands, crossed across the chest at their wrists, each hold three gold puppet strings. The shoulders and yoke of the robe are ornamented in blue and green with touches of yellow, and the hem has gold lines and a gold meander with tendrils of blue, green, and peach. Green-soled sandals with gold thongs are on the figure's maroon feet.

Except for the hair, the softer lines of the face, the necklace, yoke of the robe, brooch, and the somewhat more slender hands, the female figure on the right-hand (north) panel is precisely like its male counterpart. The maroon hair falls in four strands and curls slightly at the shoulder line. A band of blue and rose yellow-centered flowers ornaments the hair, the necklace is red and green with a green pendant, and the brooch below the green-trimmed yoke of the robe is blue, yellow, and mustard-color with a center of darker blue.

Each figure manipulates four tiers of puppets costumed in a multiplicity of bright colors. In the upper tier of the south panel, a young satyr crouches before a girl in a flowered peasant costume, a girl holding a bird rides a deer, a dancing girl brandishes a branch, and a man dances at her right. Below those fairy-tale figures are a pair of boxers, and three women evidently representing tennis, swimming, and golf. The third tier from the top contains a cowboy with his horse and dog, a man firing a rifle, and a war-bonneted Indian with a tomahawk. The bottom tier represents five variously costumed female dancers including one in a tutu who executes a high kick. The uppermost tier of the north panel represents a red-coated soldier in red



shako, gold cloak, white breeches, and blue boots who holds up a blue sword, a seminude girl riding a dragon, a fawn nibbling foliage, and a seminude woman bearing a basket of fruit on her head. Harlequin and Columbine, a Panpipe-playing satyr, and a man and woman masquerading in 18th-century costume occupy the second tier down. The tier below contains a seminude female snake charmer, a brown animal trainer in white shorts wrestling with his bear, a geisha, and a dancing sailor, and the bottom tier depicts five dancing women, one with an airily floating scarf. A Pflueger office press release suggested a possible total of 70 different colors in the mosaic. Most of the maroon and gold areas are formed of square tesserae. The tiles of other colors are mostly irregular in shape and are cut to fit like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

The two monumental and static figures of solemn, almost hieratic, aspect symbolize, in the words of a Pflueger office press release, "'man' and 'woman' . . . representing the guiding part of the theatrical and motion picture industry." The great mosaic, impressive in size and colorful in detail, serves as a kind of immense billboard announcing to the city that the Paramount is a place of entertainment. Thus the architecture is made to serve a symbolic function appropriate to its actual use.

The original marquee was (like the present one) an integral part of the facade design rather than an incongruous appendage as in so many theatres that adopted past styles. It was, as a Pflueger press release put it, "a fitting base for the great mosaic and sign above. Its lines are simple. The usual 'jazz' is entirely missing, . . . ." It was rectangular, with simple horizontal lines and no cresting. A two-tiered attraction board below an upper half with the word PARAMOUNT, the whole framed in bright metal composed the front. Beyond rounded corners, the sides had three-tiered attraction boards below a deeper frame. That marquee had a silver and white soffit ornamented with perhaps as many as 3000 small incandescent bulbs arranged in a radial pattern. The soffit and the ceiling of the outer vestibule were a continuum. The original marquee was removed in the mid-1960s to permit subway construction and street widening. The present marquee is triangular in plan, its apex blunted slightly by a downward continuation of the forward edge of the theatre sign. The two panels echo the design of the original single-paneled fascia, having two-tiered attraction boards below taller panel strips each bearing the word PARAMOUNT. The movable letters of the attraction boards

are white, set against a black background. The letters spelling PARAMOUNT are outlined in red, have white centers, and are set into a gray matrix. The white letters are back-lit, and the centers of the PARAMOUNT letters contain incandescent bulbs contrasting with their back-lit red outlines. The soffit of the marquee is a truncated version of the original marquee soffit.

The vertical sign, like the horizontal marquee, is an integral part of the facade design, and, of course, a far more conspicuous one. It projects about 10' from the wall plane and soars upward for well over 100'. Its bright silvery metal sheathing is tangent to the wall, so the cantilevering of its steel frame is (unlike that of most theatre signs) entirely concealed. Most of the sign is vertically scored, but the lower surfaces from the base of the marquee to the line where the mosaic figures begins are horizontally scored, as are the surfaces above the mosaic-faced parapet wall. The channels of all the scoring, and the outer corners, are illuminated by a total of about 7,000 feet of neon tubing. Horizontal tubing continues across the top, center, and base of the marquee, thus firmly uniting the marquee and sign. The letters spelling PARAMOUNT on each side of the sign are white porcelain bordered in red, their centers lighted by incandescent bulbs and their outlines by neon tubing. The sign rises about 8' above the top of the mosaic and runs west about 25', passing over the parapet and descending to the roof. Thus, sign and wall are interlocked, keyed into each other. It should be noted that the composition of this remarkable facade is based on a system of intersecting planes.

4. Structural system, framing: The structural system is reinforced concrete spanned by one very large steel I-beam to support the balcony, and a steel girder and truss system to support the roofs.
5. Openings, doorways and doors: There are seven sets of paired doors spanning the west wall of the outer vestibule and set below a striated bright metal lintel. The doors each have a large single panel of frosted glass, and a push plate and a kick plate, both made of bright silvery metal. Although the original plans indicate three sets of paired doors at the 21st Street entrance to the orchestra foyer, a photograph shows four sets now in place. The inner set of doors was moved about 8' into the foyer to allow for space for the new ticket booth. The doors are similar

to those at the Broadway (front) entrance just mentioned, but their frames appear to be slenderer. The exit and stage doors were not noted. The office and dressing-room windows were not noted.

6. Roof: The auditorium roof has a very low double pitch with truncated gable ends, also of very low pitch. The roof over the grand lobby is nearly flat, sloping very gently toward the west. The stage roof is flat and has a large smoke vent centered upon it. Composition roofing covers all roofs, and all are concealed from below by parapets.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: The basement, or ground floor, as the architect preferred to call it, contains public areas below the vestibules and grand lobby, and service areas below the orchestra foyer and stage. The service areas are connected by a passage running beneath the auditorium. Paired stairways underneath the lower flights of the grand staircase lead directly into a public lounge about 32' wide by around 45' long under the grand lobby. A wide opening centered on the east wall of the public lounge leads into the women's lounge and is flanked on the south by a relatively shallow alcove containing four telephone booths. The entrance to the women's smoking room is centered on the north wall of the women's lounge, and the entrance to the cosmetic room is opposite to it. A small maid's room occupies the southeast corner of the suite, and the lavatory, entered from the cosmetic room, takes up the remaining space.

The wide opening into the men's lounge is centered on the north wall of the public lounge, opposite the entrance to the women's lounge. A small anteroom opening north from the men's lounge leads to the lavatory, which is under the orchestra foyer, in the northwest corner of the suite. A telephone room, reached from a short passage running west from the men's lounge, occupies the southwest corner of the suite.

The short passage just mentioned leads to a lateral passage running north-south under the west side of the orchestra foyer. South of the short passage,

according to the original plans, the east side of the lateral passage serves stairs in the southeast corner, and the head usher's room, ushers' club, ushers' locker room, and ushers' lavatory. The southwest corner contains a janitor's room, porter's room, and utility closet. North of the short passage, beyond the above-mentioned public men's lavatory (which does not open into the lateral passage), the original plans indicate a motor generator room, scrub women's room, janitor's storeroom, and a large room containing the compressor and refrigerating machinery. Stairs to the orchestra foyer rise from the northwest end of the lateral passage.

Toward the north side of the building, a long passage runs west about 130' from the lateral passage just mentioned to a north lateral passage underneath the stage. (There are plenum chambers below other areas of the auditorium floor.) An electrical contactor room, entered from the long passage, is below the auditorium northwest exit. According to the original plans, the stage hands' room south of the long passage opens from the lateral passage, and a lavatory, and the sewage ejector room, lamp room, and electricians' open to the northeast from it. The switchboard room in the northeast corner and a property room in the northwest corner of the below-stage area open from the north end of the passage. Beyond the building line, there is a transformer vault north of the transformer room. West of the north lateral passage, there are stairs, a musicians' locker room, a dancers' locker room and a lavatory. The central space below the stage is occupied by the trap room, from which the orchestra pit is entered. South of the trap room, there is a shorter lateral passage with the carpenter shop and paint shop west of it and three ancillary rooms, including the general machine room under the auditorium southwest exit, and stairs east of it.

- b. Orchestra floor: The orchestra, or first, floor plan is a simple and straightforward one. Beyond the shelter of the marquee, the outer vestibule contains a freestanding ticket booth at the building line. The vestibule measures about 15' deep by 42' wide and leads up a very slightly sloping floor to seven sets of paired entrance doors spanning its west wall. (The thick walls and the shallow display cases lining them account for the approximately 8-foot difference between the 42' inner width and the

over-all width of about 50'.) Beyond the entrance doors, a shallow inner vestibule with a convex west wall of seven sets of paired doors leads to the grand lobby, which measures about 42' by 80' and is almost 60' high. An archway about 25' wide below the intermediate flights and second landing of the grand staircase leads west into the orchestra foyer running north-south behind the auditorium.

The foyer curves slightly and measures about 20' across for much of its length but widens somewhat at each end. It extends beyond the width of the auditorium to accommodate stairs, a janitor's room, and an exit at its south end, and stairs opening off its west side, and an enlarged enclosed vestibule opening onto 21st Street, at its north end. (The 21st Street entrance, formerly an exit, is now provided with a box office and is called the "carriage entrance.") Five sets of paired doors lead from the orchestra foyer into the auditorium aisles.

The auditorium measures about 120' across the rear and narrows to a bit less than 85' at the outer edges of the "columns of light" flanking the proscenium. The extreme distance from the curtain line to the concave rear wall of the orchestra is about 140'. The height from the floor to the ceiling grille is around 75' at its maximum point. Two of the three exits in each side wall have paired doors. Those nearest the stage are under open arches about 10' wide leading to short curving passages that end at two sets of paired doors facing east onto exit courts flanking the building. Except for the aisle in front of the orchestra pit, no cross aisles connect the five aisles, three of which divide the seating into four sections. Pflueger's initial project called for 2268 orchestra seats, but the published figure after completion of the theatre was 2126 in 41 rows. Since the restoration, there are 1714 seats in the orchestra. Short flights of six steps at the head of each side aisle flank the orchestra pit and lead to the stage. The curved exit passages flanking the proscenium occupy only a portion of the area underneath the two organ lofts. The space behind the south exit passage is occupied by the stairway leading to the south lateral passage below the stage, and by a property room opening from the stage wings. A flight of four steps, and another property room, are behind the north exit passage. The orchestra pit floor can be raised to the level of the stage. The

proscenium opening is about 65' wide and 50' high, an actual height that is visually reduced to about 38' by the fixed grand drape.

The stage is about 20' wide at its south end, 45' wide at the north end adjoining the dressing-room unit, and 115' long. The south wings are about 35' deep. The gridiron is about 75' above the stage floor. The original plans indicate an entry with doorman's booth and a stair lobby on the west side of the dressing-room unit, a service passage to the stage on the east side, a music library in the northeast corner, and rooms for the orchestra leader, assistant orchestra leader, organist, stage manager, and assistant stage manager, and small lavatories. However, the published plans (Motion Picture Herald, March 12, 1932) show a quite different arrangement of the unit without any uses specified for the spaces. The stage service passage, with a pair of large scene doors, is on the west side in the published version, and apparently only two private rooms are indicated.

- c. Mezzanine: At the east end of the building, a store-room, reached by a steep stairway concealed in the south wall and entered from the inner vestibule, a light chamber, and a terrace supporting the "fountain of light" facing into the grand lobby are above the outer and inner vestibules. The west end of the grand lobby contains the upper flight of the grand staircase leading from the upper landing to the mezzanine foyer. That foyer is above the orchestra foyer but is more than 40' shorter, as there is a suite of offices at its north end. The original plans show a manager and secretary's office in the northeast corner, a publicity office in the northwest corner, cashier's office and treasurer's office west of a passage, and offices for the assistant manager, the "ticket girls," and an undesignated office east of the passage. The published plan differs only in that the cashier's and treasurer's offices are shown as one office, and two telephone booths are indicated beside the entrance to the office passage. In addition to the stairways at the north and south ends of the foyer, there is a stairway at the northeast corner, required because the north stairway from the orchestra foyer ends at the mezzanine level.

A lounge suite and a plenum chamber are inserted beneath the balcony. The entrance from the mezzanine foyer into the public lounge is through three openings,

each about 7' wide, separated by two piers, on axis with the head of the grand staircase. The public lounge measures about 25' by 42', and the wide entrances to the men's and women's lounges are opposite each other, centered on the slightly concave north and south walls. Southeast of the men's lounge are a closet, and a small entry leading to the lavatory. Northeast of the women's lounge, there is a semi-octagonal-ended cosmetic room from which the lavatory opens. A vomitorium about 8' wide at each end of the foyer leads past the outer wall of the lounge suite and a janitor's closet to the lower cross aisle of the balcony. An exit through paired doors at each end of that aisle leads to an outside open and unroofed metal fire escape. The cross aisle divides the front, or loge, section of the balcony from those above it. The loge section has five stepped aisles, making four sections of seats, each having six rows. Originally, 312 seats were planned, but 324 were initially installed. As previously noted, the proscenium is flanked by organ chambers. The original plans show six private dressing rooms, that in the northeast corner larger than the others, and two chorus dressing rooms on the mezzanine level. The published plan varies only in that five instead of six private dressing rooms are shown.

- d. Balcony: The balcony foyer and a plenum chamber are inserted below the top third of the balcony. The foyer is reached by a north stairway that commences at the mezzanine level, and by the south stairway. It is about 15' wide and runs above the mezzanine foyer. At this upper level, there is a roof over the office unit, and there is a fan room over the north stairway that ends at the mezzanine level. Vomitoria at each side ascend to connect the foyer with the middle cross aisle of the balcony, and the north and south stairways rise to the upper cross aisle connecting the rear corners of the balcony. Both the middle and upper cross aisles have paired exit doors at each end, those at the middle aisle connecting with exterior fire escapes. Stepped aisles divide the middle and upper balcony seating, which was originally planned for 948 patrons. The actual original total for those sections was 984 in 18 rows. The present actual capacity of the balcony, including the loge section, is 1284. The original seats throughout the house varied from 19" to 22" in width and were 2'10" from back to back. The present total of orchestra and balcony seating together is 2998, or 436 fewer seats than the original capacity. At this level, the dressing-room

unit has a third floor, originally containing a trial screening room and its adjacent projection room, three dressing rooms, a fan room, a janitor's room, and stairs.

- e. Top level: Most of the area above the grand lobby is occupied by a fan room about 25' high. There is an attic of similar height above the auditorium. At the top of the stage loft, or flies, the distance from the gridiron to the roof is slightly less than 15'. The projection room and its ancillary rooms are above the west end of the grand lobby and are reached by a stairway opening off the upper balcony cross aisle at the rear of the house. The projection room itself measures 12' by 47' and overlooks the auditorium through a large rectangular port, three large square ports, and six small square ports in three diagonally set pairs. A sound room, rheostat room, and lavatory complete the projection suite.

2. Stairways: The grand stairway rises west along the grand lobby walls in a pair of 17-step flights about 8' wide to landings in the northwest and southwest corners of the room. Both the flights and the landings are supported on walls of white-veined black marble enclosing the stairways to the basement public lounge. Opposed 8-step flights run north and south from the lower landings to a central landing. Both the short opposed flights and the central landing are supported on a three-centered bridge of the black marble. A 10-step flight about 15' wide runs west from the central landing to the mezzanine foyer. In plan, the lower landings are wide wedges with curved heads, and the 15'-wide central landing splays to a western width of about 20'. Baseboards of channeled silvery metal, and stringpieces of the same material enclosing the step ends and landings, frame the marble. Both sides of the thickly carpeted steps and landings are guarded by chromium railings supported by curving ribbons of silvery metal formed into delicately stylized palmette patterns. The wide upper flight is divided by a simple handrail.

The stairway at the south end of the orchestra foyer rises around a rectangular well south to a landing, west in a longer run to a second landing, and north to the mezzanine foyer. The upper runs to the balcony foyer and the rear of the balcony follow the same sequence of directions. The stairway at the north end of the orchestra foyer rises around a rectangular well west to a landing, south in a longer run to a second landing, and east to the mezzanine



foyer, where it ends. Another stairway begins at the north end of the mezzanine foyer, rises north past an intermediate landing to another landing, west to a landing, and south to the balcony foyer, and continues thence in a similar sequence to the rear of the balcony. These stairways all have closed strings surmounted by simple bright metal railings composed of elegantly turned balusters spaced at wide intervals to support four parallel "ribbons" of chromium and the rounded metal handrail. Between the upper "ribbon" and the handrail, a metal strip formed into an abstract wave motif laces "ribbon" and rail together. The curved walls of the landings are ornamented by gilded bas-relief plaster male and female pseudo-classical figures treated in a "moderne" manner. The walls of these stairways have simple handrails, and all steps and landings are thickly carpeted. All other stairways in the building are strictly utilitarian, with concrete steps and pipe railings.

3. Flooring: The outer vestibule floor is light gray terrazzo inset with inward-curving bands of red and green that suggest paths from the sidewalk to the doors, lines that "urge the pedestrian intending to pass to turn and enter," as a Pflueger office press release described them. The inner vestibule is paved with black stone, terrazzo, or marble. The lavatories and men's mezzanine lounge have tile floors, the latter set in an elaborated variant of the herringbone pattern. The auditorium orchestra and balcony floors are concrete, with carpeted aisles. All other public-area floors are thickly carpeted concrete. The carpets of the grand lobby, foyers, public stairways, and auditorium aisles are patterned. Those in the lounges are plain. Non-public-area floors are concrete. The stage floor is wooden and is carried on a steel frame.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls in mechanical areas and backstage are concrete. Some staff rooms, offices, and the dressings rooms, have walls finished in painted plaster. Ceilings in non-public areas are concrete or plaster. The wall and ceiling finishes of the public areas are integral parts of the decoration and will be described below under "Decorative features and trim."
5. Doorways and doors: The seven sets of paired rectangular doors leading from the inner vestibule to the grand lobby are hung below a long and comparatively narrow black lintel framed in channeled chromium and containing a single-level attraction board utilizing movable white

letters. From the grand lobby side, this installation is slightly concave in plan. Each door has three square translucent panels of etched glass. The black-lacquered frames of the doors are edged at top and bottom with channeled chromium, and horizontal bars of the same material separate the glass panels. Each door has a plain rectangular chromium push plate.

Four sets of rectangular paired wooden doors lead from the enlarged 21st Street vestibule to the orchestra foyer. Each door has 12 translucent panels of frosted glass etched with stylized floral motifs. The panels are arranged in four tiers of three panels each. Tiers with square central panels flanked by very narrow panels alternate with tiers containing rectangular central panels flanked by somewhat narrower panels. Each door has a push plate and a kick plate, both of plain bright metal. The five sets of paired doors leading from the orchestra foyer to the auditorium aisles are identical to the doors just described.

The paired rectangular metal exit doors of the auditorium are painted with highly abstract "jazz" patterns and are furnished with panic bars. Each leaf of the paired rectangular doors leading from the cosmetic room of the mezzanine women's suite to the lavatory is plain except for an inset panel of Chinese fretwork at its inner edge. Apparently, one door swings in, and the other swings out, as there is only one push plate on the cosmetic room side. Both doors have kick plates. The door from the mezzanine foyer to the office corridor is perfectly plain and has a push plate but no kick plate. The narrow telephone booth doors beside it each have a rectangular clear glass panel. The other doors throughout the building were not noted. Many doorways in the public areas have no doors. Except for the opening from the grand stairway to the mezzanine foyer, and the openings from the orchestra to the exit passages below the organ grilles, all doorless doorways are rectangular. Their decorative trim will be described below. There are no actual windows in the public areas. The false windows in the grand lobby will be described below. The office and dressing-room windows were not noted.

6. Decorative features and trim: Outer vestibule. The north and south walls of the outer vestibule repeat the design of the east elevation piers. On each of the two walls, three glazed poster display cases framed in channeled bright silvery metal form a continuous unit with

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the case facing Broadway. The zones above and below the shallow cases are faced with polished black granite. Three aluminum or chromium bas-relief roundels by Robert Boardman Howard ornament the upper zone of each wall. Both flora and fauna (flying birds, and squirrels) are represented. The channeled metal strip capping the cases continues across the west wall as a lintel surmounted by a black attraction board using white letters (arranged at both the original opening and the opening of the restored house to spell THE PARAMOUNT GREET'S YOU). As previously noted, doors take up the rest of the west wall, and the silver and white ceiling, a continuation of the marquee soffit, is studded with light bulbs in a combination of swirling and radiating patterns. A very simple rectangular ticket booth with chamfered corners is centered at the building line on the very slightly rising terrazzo floor already described. Above a plain polished black granite base, it is all glass, very thinly framed in chromium. The corners, sides, and back panels of glass have a moderately high band of frosted stylized floral pattern, partially screening the interior from view, and a lightly frosted narrow border runs around the top of the glass. A Pflueger press release described the booth as "a show case, lit through the clear glass top by the ceiling lights above, for the American beauties who will serve the patrons with tickets."

Inner vestibule. The inner vestibule has a ceiling of cast aluminum and silver leaf, with gilded ornamental trim. The wall paneling and doors are black lacquer, and the door panels contain "carved opalescent" glass.

Grand lobby. The marble-faced lower zone of the grand lobby north and south walls continues the black-and-silver motif of the slightly concave east (entrance) wall. Above a "baseboard" of channeled chromium, slender horizontal and vertical strips of the same metal frame four shallow rectangular niches set above grilled vents. Intermediate horizontal strips further subdivide the relatively broad expanses of marble between the niches, and all horizontals are aligned with those of the east wall. A metal frieze, wider than the strips and embossed with two interlocking rows forming a rectilinear wave pattern, runs just below the narrow marble course that caps the zone. The west wall has no lower zone. Instead, there is a wide passage running between the lower flights of the grand stairway and under the bridge that supports the intermediate flights and upper landing.

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The lower zones of the north and south walls form podia supporting lofty piers between which are seven false windows set within approximately four-foot-deep reveals. The piers are over 35' high, and, except for the broad concave channels and rounded nosings of their forward edges, are nearly rectangular in plan. They are surfaced in vermilion-painted plaster. The plaster soffits of the seven bays are incised with an abstract geometrical floral motif and are gilded. The "windows" are also over 35' high. Thin metal muntins, arranged in a geometrical pattern to suggest very slender stalks ending in highly abstract flowers, divide the etched amber glass of the "windows" into trapezoidal shapes. The glass is illuminated by reflected light projected from within the piers into shallow light chambers, producing an evenly diffused softly glowing effect.

Each of the marble window ledges supports a nearly-life-sized and very conventionalized group of gilded plaster dancers. The groups in the first, third, fifth, and seventh bays each represent a line of four identically posed female dancers. They are cast from two similar but mirror-image molds and are so placed that the lines of their bodies all lead the eye toward the middle (fourth) bay. The second, fourth, and sixth bays contain identical groups representing three female nudes amid a very stylized swirl of foliage or drapery. All of these groups have the effect of railings, or window guards, in their respective bays.

In passing, it is worth noting that some of the original sections show piers that were decidedly splayed, and soffits that were set at a  $45^{\circ}$  angle from the horizontal plane. The elimination of the splays and the reduction of the angle greatly strengthened the design. Those subtle adjustments may possibly indicate Timothy Pflueger's guiding hand.

Four plain matte gold bands form an approximately 8'-wide "frame," as Pflueger called it, at each side of the central feature of both end walls and ceiling. The bands composing the "frames" are stepped inward and upward to form shallow offsets and continue without interruption up both east and west walls and along the ceiling. The grand lobby has no conventional lighting fixtures. Instead, it receives its light not only from the "windows" just described but also from the central feature of both end walls and ceiling, a "canopy of light." That remarkable feature is about 25' wide, rises the full height of

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the east wall above the entrance, extends the length of the ceiling, and descends to form a curtain motif above the mezzanine opening in the west wall. It is composed of grillework masking light chambers. The grilles are made up of 12"-wide strips of galvanized sheet metal set on edge and joined. In a letter to HABS, George B. Wagner, who supervised the construction of the grilles, described their assembly as follows: "No particular artistry /was/ involved, just a lot of cutting, bending, and soldering necessary to follow the drawings."

The "canopy of light" is divided longitudinally by gold-colored metal moldings into a wide central field flanked by much narrower borders. The pattern of the borders, an extended zig-zag enriched with small diamond shapes, runs throughout the length of the "canopy." The central field has a very rich and complex intersecting chevron pattern for most of its length, but that pattern ends part of the way down the west wall. The rest of the grille is composed of a swirling scroll pattern, the scrolls diminishing in size as they near the top. An elliptical opening, resembling an oeil-de-boeuf set on end, is centered in the west wall grille and serves as an overlook from the balcony foyer into the grand lobby. The grille ends above the mezzanine opening in a delicately cusped honeycombed "fringe."

The moldings dividing the borders from the central field descend to (or rise from) rostra flanking the upper run of the grand stairway. They thus continue (or originate) as colonette-like elements making the mezzanine opening tripartite. Each "colonette" has a duplicate aligned just west of it to give visual support to the full depth of the soffit. The rostra have solid reeded podia about 5' wide finished in burnished gilding, and are fronted by continuations of the stair railings.

B. J. S. Cahill, apparently emulating the effusive style of Walter Pater, described the "canopy of light" as follows:

The dominating motif /of the grand lobby/ is the huge green patterned panel of light hung as it were longitudinally in one great tapis-vert of corruscating embroidery with borders of labyrinthine fret-work around a field of diamond shaped patterns and illusive stalactites of seeming vitreous illumination, magically worked with patches and spiculae of green light itself as through unseen lenses were focussing all the color of the forest on to a bed of monster

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crystals. The whole beaded glittering area does not however suggest the hardness of reflecting quartz but the softness and illusiveness of dappling sun beams filtered through spring foliage and falling on the rippling waves of a moss bottomed brook. (Architect and Engineer, March 1932)

In front of the east end of the "canopy of light," the terrace over the inner vestibule supports another noteworthy feature, a composition executed in sculptured glass and kinetic light. Towering nearly 40' above the entrance, this "fountain of light" has at least 12 successive planes of etched and carved or molded glass, the low forward ones representing waves, the higher intermediate ones suggesting swelling billows, and those at the back rising high to symbolize great round-headed fountain jets. Behind the planes, amber lights play in a constantly swirling effect. The diagonal upward thrust of the thin black muntins required to secure the glass increases the soaring effect. Cahill was moved by the "fountain of light" to see a "fountain of life" that suggested to him the image of a Buddha. Bevis Hillier may have been more to the point when he merely observed that the "fountain line" is as characteristic of Art Deco as is the "whiplash line" of Art Nouveau. (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Art Deco)

Certainly, the illuminated glass elements used throughout the building are among its most remarkable features. In a letter to HABS, M. B. Roller, formerly associated with the Thomas Day Co., one of the original suppliers, described the glass as a special laminated product, clear glass fused over white milk glass, or "opal." "Ivory opal" was the flashed glass used in the "windows," lighting fixtures, and "fountain."

The extraordinary grand lobby, with its soft green "canopy of light" framed in gold, its amber "fountain of light," its amber "windows" flanked by vermillion piers, its delicately white-veined black marble trimmed in silvery metal, its predominantly red carpet, and its accents of burnished gold, is, as a Pflueger press release said, "Absolutely unique in design and without precedent. . . . And now we come to what is perhaps the most amazing element in this lobby . . . . There is no solid end wall and no solid ceiling!" The release also noted that the "canopy of light," not so called therein, "is an invention of the architects, - new for this theatre."

Basement public lounge. The public lounge in the basement, although actually over 12' high, appears to be low because of its relative size (about 32' by 45') and the heavy convex-sided beams that divide its plaster ceiling into five transverse compartments. The long east and west walls have five bays each, the second and fourth bays projecting slightly to accommodate light chambers illuminating flat glass panel strips. Each of the four back-lit panels runs from the floor almost to the ceiling and is divided by aluminum muntins into five vertical sections. The projecting bays (called "wall piers" by Pflueger) have rounded corners and are painted red. The other plaster wall surfaces are painted gray. Wide mirrored niches are centered on the north and south walls. A tan band runs around the upper zone of the walls, and the tan ceiling beams have fluted ends and centers accented in silver. The ceiling planes between the beams have incised plaster geometric patterns in red, tan, and silver. Ornament and metalwork throughout the room are silvered, and the plain carpet is green. The comparatively simple frosted glass ceiling lights are rectangular. Original furniture includes or included two large four-sided upholstered seats in dark (ebonized?) wood with gold or silver trim. Their flat rectangular highly polished centers each support or supported a marble-based female statuette. Other furniture includes or included upholstered rectangular sofas, and upholstered benches with ebonized (?) bases in a moderne interpretation of the Regency Grecian manner accented in gold or silver.

Basement women's lounge. The plaster walls of the women's lounge in the basement are painted a warm gray, except for the red fluted pilaster strips thinly edged with silver that flank each rounded corner. The four corners of this square room contain floor-to-ceiling concave quarter-round amber-back-lit etched glass panels, creating an unusual spatial effect. Wall openings are trimmed in narrow silvery metal, and the narrow molded cornice strip is also silvered. A large silvered plaster bas-relief, representing a female nude blowing a slender horn and sitting precariously on a goat prancing over a stylized cloud and shooting star, is centered on the east wall opposite the entrance. The wide periphery of the ceiling, variously reported as tan or orchid, forms an extremely shallow cove, on which shallow silver flutes, corresponding in width to the wall openings, are centered. The intermediate zone of the ceiling is slightly recessed, its corners negotiated by convex compound curves. A large recessed extremely shallow silvered saucer dome occupies the center of the ceiling and contains a very large-scaled

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plaster centerpiece of stylized foliation from which depends a two-tiered frosted glass lobe-edged light fixture accented by radiating metal spokes. The plain carpet is green. There were originally figured portieres at the doorways. Original furniture included, or includes, an upholstered sofa with very slender moderne lines and gilded or silvered ball feet, a pair of lamp tables en suite with the sofa, and upholstered side chairs in a moderne version of the Regency Grecian manner.

Women's smoking room. The women's smoking room (in the basement) has black lacquer wooden walls accented by vermilion bands above the high baseboard and at the cornice, and by three bands of the same color dividing each corner horizontally into quarters. Opposite the entrance, a mural painted by Charles Stafford Duncan in a flat-color technique takes up most of the wall. It depicts a man, a summer-hatted woman, and two younger women picnicking under a green-leaved tree with red trunk and branches. Three sailboats and a cluster of small beige islands are in the background, and a bird flies into the tree. Half-figures by Duncan are centered on each side wall. One represents a girl in a yellow dress holding a red comic mask and a green tragic mask. There are shooting stars behind her head. The half-figure opposite depicts a girl in a red dress holding a small dark green harp. The plaster ceiling has a series of receding planes, three narrow ones nearest the walls, two wider ones, and a central rectangular panel. The ceiling is finished in gold, with the edges of the recessions painted green. A simple lighting fixture in the form of an inverted half-tube of frosted glass is suspended horizontally just under the ceiling by metal straps. The plain carpet is vermilion. A black, green, and gold Art Deco console table stands before the large mural, its floral carving polychromed, and its shaped top veneered in an exotic wood. A pair of gold-upholstered semicircular armchairs in black, green, gold, and exotic veneer flank the table. This small, richly colorful room contains what are probably the most elegant original examples of Art Deco furniture in the theatre.

Basement cosmetic room. The cosmetic room of the women's suite in the basement has plaster walls and ceiling painted yellow and trimmed with silver. The walls are banded with mirrors above heavy glass shelves. The carpet is black.

Basement men's lounge. The walls of the men's lounge in the basement are of adzed quartered oak. Their natural



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finish is described in a Pflueger press release as having a "soft velvety effect." The tile floor is laid in what the same release called the "suggestion" of an Indian pattern.

Orchestra foyer. The walls and ceiling of the slightly curving orchestra foyer are painted plaster, the walls crowned by a plain band capped by a narrow reeded molding, and the ceiling bordered by a slightly wider band of incised and bas-relief irregular scroll patterns finished in gold and silver leaf. The five auditorium entrances in the west wall are deeply recessed and flanked by wide wooden engaged reeded piers supporting soffits bordered by offset reeding. Above the auditorium doorways (whose doors are described above), there are gilded plaster transom panels with symmetrical flowers and foliage whose stems swirl in "fountain lines." North of the wide opening from the grand lobby, the east wall has two shallow floor-to-ceiling mirrored niches flanked by wide wooden reeded pilasters. Both east and west walls are fitted with hanging studs and electrical outlets for picture lights. The south wall backs a staircase. The new north wall is placed about 8' farther into the foyer than the former one and has four sets of paired doors instead of the original three. Otherwise, it duplicates the former wall. The lighting fixtures are inverted etched glass cones close-set against circular bright metal ventilators. Original furniture includes somewhat ponderous Art Deco sofas whose arms widen into podia supporting elegant small metal table lamps with conical shades. The podia appear to have gilded vertically reeded sides with ebonized bases and tops. The predominantly red Art Deco carpet has the same pattern as the carpet in the grand lobby.

Mezzanine foyer. The moderately curved mezzanine foyer is more elaborately ornamented than either the orchestra foyer or the balcony foyer. Between the north and south stairways, the plaster west wall is articulated by wide ivory-painted wooden reeded pilasters into 13 bays, four south of the three mezzanine lounge suite entrance bays (where the pilasters become piers), and six north of them. Except that there are no pilasters or piers at the head of the wide opening from the grand stairway opposite the lounge entrances, the east wall corresponds in arrangement to the west wall. The bays not containing openings have alternating decorative schemes. Five bays along each wall are ornamented by gold-leafed bas-relief moderne-classical figures against a "dark ivory" field of painted plaster. Each of the three alternating bays contains a large nine-

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paned mirror framed in gilded bound reeding supporting an Art Deco lintel crowned with a very stylized voluted flowering plant motif against a field of dappled lavender and gold plaster. The transom panels above the three lounge suite entrances display highly stylized plant or "fountain" motifs. Above the bays containing vomitoria, and those facing them, multi-bordered transom panels continue across the ceiling as single units. The plaster ceiling is painted a pale gray-green and is bordered by a bas-relief band of gold-and-silver-leafed formalized foliated ornament interrupted by small paired volutes (or reeded "fountain lines") in front of each pilaster. The two-tiered etched glass lighting fixtures are rectangular, with rounded corners. Bas-relief metal-leafed plaster repeats their outline on the ceiling, and there are paired volutes and a floral symbol in plaster at each narrow end. Small etched glass wall lights with metal palmette crests are affixed to the upper middle pane of each mirror. The carpet repeats the Art Deco pattern of the grand lobby and orchestra foyer carpets, but the colors are changed to make green instead of red the predominant hue.

Balcony foyer. The balcony foyer has painted plaster walls and ceiling. It is less than 15' wide, narrower than the foyers below it. The walls backing the north and south stairways have bas-relief gold-leafed moderne-classical figures at the curved landings. No pilasters or cornices break the plain surfaces of the gently curving east and west walls. Their only ornament occurs at the deep recesses leading to the two vomitoria, and in the shallow niches opposite them. Widely splayed floor-to-ceiling panels flanking the recesses display swirling Art Deco compositions of flowers, foliage, and tropical birds executed in gilded intaglio and bas-relief plaster. The two niches contain floor-to-ceiling multi-paned mirrors flanked by widely splayed narrower panels of similar ornament. The only other features of the warm-toned walls are the metal-rimmed oval opening overlooking the grand lobby, and the hanging studs and electrical outlets for picture lights. The flat ceiling is bordered by three very wide plain bands that rise at a slight angle in shallow offsets toward the center. Where the offsets step up, the bands have very narrow edgings of simple stenciled ornament. The principal ornaments of the ceiling are two indirectly-lighted golden domes, or lacunars, whose frames extend from recess to niche athwart the main axis of the foyer, causing jogs in the bands bordering the ceiling. Their relatively heavy gilded frames are composed of three concentric moldings of identical bas-relief formal floral

ornament, and their chamfered corners convert their basically rectangular outlines into octagons. The lighting fixtures are shallow inverted cones of pattern-etched glass set below circular ventilators. The green Art Deco carpet has the same pattern as that of the mezzanine foyer below.

Mezzanine public lounge. The public lounge on the mezzanine level has very slightly bowed plaster walls painted a color described variously as "golden gray" or "grayish tan" in Pflueger press releases. The east (entrance) wall is concave, the west wall is convex, and the shorter north and south walls are both somewhat more perceptibly concave. They are severely plain except for a narrow beaded cornice trim, simple reeding flanking the entrance, a mirrored niche opposite the entrance, and the wide incised bas-relief plaster frame by Robert Boardman Howard surrounding the entrance to the women's lounge, and the identical frame opposite it at the men's lounge entrance. The shallow pentagonal floor-to-ceiling mirrored niche centered on the west wall is fronted by a back-lighted waist-high parapet of etched glass baffles set in three concave planes. There are two small rectangular grilles of labyrinthine pattern centered high on the west wall between the niche and the corners of the room, and both east and west walls are furnished with hanging studs and electrical outlets for picture lights. A pair of relatively small rectangular mirror-backed etched glass wall lights flanks each of the two inner lounge entrances.

Howard's floor-to-ceiling Art Deco plasterwork enframing those entrances fills about a third of each end wall and constitutes the principal ornamental feature of the room. At the right-hand side, a man in full evening dress, i.e., top hat, white tie, and tails, holds a flower in his left hand and a cane in his upraised right hand. He is posed against a background of stylized foliage and flowers. At the left, against a similar background, a woman in what appears to be a filmy evening gown holds a round mirror in her upraised left hand. The lintel spanning the composition represents a pair of stylized peacocks (possibly an oblique reference to the stylish figures below) facing each other in front of the rays emanating from a sun disk whose upper half is cut off by the ceiling. The elegantly dressed and posed figures reflect the contemporary ideal of sophisticated revelry, an ideal expressed shortly thereafter in the series of dance films starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. The bas-reliefs are finished in lavender-glazed silver edged with gold.

The plaster ceiling forms a shallowly coffered segmental vault. Six of the seven longitudinal rows of 12 square panels, or coffers, are stencilled with alternating stylized designs representing an antelope with foliage, and pinwheel-like foliage. The central row alternates stylized leaves and ball-like flowers with the "pinwheel" pattern. The coffers are finished in lavender alternating with "reddish" and "greenish" tones stencilled in gold and silver. The four lighting fixtures suspended from the central longitudinal row of coffers are shaped like inverted pyramids formed by six square horizontal planes of etched glass that diminish in size as they descend. They are supported by stepped metal straps, one centered on each side of the fixture. The plain carpet is a deep mulberry color. The original furniture includes a circular marble-topped metal center table with an elaborate Art Deco base composed of elongated-ogee supports with curled ends surrounding a palm-stalk motif at the center of the circular base from which they spring. The eight ogee supports are pierced with a delicate pattern of flowers and leaves, and the rim around the marble top is gadrooned. An upholstered sofa combining a metallic finish with an exotic veneer, and a floor lamp with a stepped base and a fluted shade of three diminishing tiers are among the other Art Deco furnishings of this public lounge.

Mezzanine women's lounge. The women's lounge is about one third the size of the adjoining mezzanine public lounge. The plaster walls and ceiling are painted a soft green accented in burnished silver leaf and matte silver. The jambs and soffit of the entrance, like those opposite at the men's end of the lounge suite, are sheathed in channeled chromium. The entrance is flanked by silver-leafed pilaster strips ornamented with a bas-relief stylized flowering vine climbing behind an erratically zig-zagging trellis. The corners of the room contain wide floor-to-ceiling bands of stencilled matte silver ornament with wavy-edged outer borders. Each band has a regularly scattered group of highly conventionalized flowers. As throughout the suite, the baseboards are thin, narrow, and without moldings. There is no cornice, but the wavy borders of the corner bands are continued across the walls at ceiling height. Rectangular mirrors, each fronted by a low rectangular console table supported on a vine-patterned wrought-metal base, are centered on the east and west walls. Each of the two mirrors bears a lighting fixture about 12" wide and 18" high formed of 12 vertical blades of etched glass, their projecting edges fanning outward into the room. On the east wall, there is an air conditioning grille in the form of musical notes on a treble cleff.

The east and west ends of the ceiling rise at a moderate angle in four slightly offset wide bands toward the center. Their narrow silver-leaved edges are, in ascending order, wavy, jagged, cusped, and pinked. The lines of the offsets are continued across the north and south walls as plain offsets, giving an effect like clapboarding. The central expanse of the ceiling contains a square indirectly-lighted lacunar surrounded by three wide bands bordered with narrow channeling. The lacunar contains an indirect lighting fixture of silvered bronze-accented plaster in the form of an inverted pyramid. The burgundy carpet is plain, and the Art Deco furniture, upholstered in varying shades of green, includes corner chairs.

Mezzanine cosmetic room. The north wall of the mezzanine cosmetic room is semi-octagonal, and the ceiling is deeply coved. The walls are lined with mirrors up to the relatively low springing line of the high plaster cove, and both mirrors and cove are lighted from a trough running between them. The mirrors are provided with a waist-high run of glass shelving. The cove is painted with vignettes representing random clumps of vegetation, flowering shrubs, trellises, a basket of flowers over the lavatory door, a vase of foliage with two pipes and a theatrical mask over an Art Deco grille, and what appears to be meant for a mosque and minaret in a palm oasis. There is a flat etched glass illuminated ceiling framed in silver above the cove. The prevailing color is light green, and the plain carpet is burgundy. The room is equipped with high-legged velvet-covered vanity stools with low backs, and slender chromium smoking stands.

Men's mezzanine lounge. The men's mezzanine lounge, or smoking room, is a relatively small room (about 12' by 24'), its quietly harmonious ambiance created by the use of large squares of Hungarian ash crotch veneer and primavera trim covering the walls and tray ceiling. Vertical runs of the primavera veneer fill each corner. The entrance, flanked on each side by six squares of the ash veneer, is trimmed in silvery channeled metal and was originally hung with tan and silver portières. The boxed cornice has a primavera-banded soffit, and a fascia of illuminated opal glass, etched in a swirling foliate pattern, that makes a frieze of light around the room. The upper third of each corner supports a quarter-round etched glass light embraced by eight horizontal fins, or "ledges," as a Pflueger press release called them. A small square labyrinth-patterned grille is centered in the upper middle square of the nine veneer squares on the west wall. The floor of this restful room has russet and brown tiles set in an elaborated herringbone Art Deco pattern "suggesting an Indian blanket," as the press release put it.

Auditorium. Except for the sheet metal proscenium columns, the auditorium side walls are of painted plaster furred out from the actual structure. The rear wall is specially treated at both orchestra and balcony levels with a sound-absorbing substance covered with pin-pricked painted canvas. Under the balcony, the only decorations are the slightly projecting reeded pilaster strips flanking the five entrances, and the bas-relief floriated motifs in the transom panels. Above, at the rear of the balcony, the wall is wholly unornamented, its only feature being the projection ports. The balcony soffit slopes slightly downward and is divided into three wide transverse bands containing simple geometric linear relief ornament and a total of eleven partly recessed large circular metal and molded glass fixtures combining lights and ventilating units. The bronze-colored balcony parapet is treated as a series of 42 plain very slightly concave sections separated by thin sharp ridges. All except the three sections at each end contain circular floodlight apertures. All sections curve inward at the base of the fascia to form a wide double band at the forward edge of the balcony soffit.

Each side wall is composed of six vertical bas-relief panel strips designed by Robert Boardman Howard and executed in a molded intaglio technique. Five of the six panels on each wall are identical in design concept although varied in arrangement of motifs, and all six are identical in width. The panels rise progressively towards the rear to meet the slight rise of the auditorium ceiling. Each is divided from its neighbor by a narrow offset, the thin edge of the jog facing east toward the rear, and the four rearward panels of each wall are divided horizontally by the balcony.

Howard's Art Deco design involves about six subjects arranged in as many as five tiers flanked by very wide borders. The subjects include various trios of female nudes in differing poses amid lush tropical vegetation, and a sword-bearing horseman clad only in a laurel wreath riding beneath a radiant sun. These glyphic sgraffiti suggest an idyllic state of natural innocence. The random repetition of the motifs varies the appearance of the conceptually identical panels. The panels are angled at their tops to continue about a fifth of the distance across the ceiling, thus unifying both planes in a single design. At the west edge of each of these similar panels, a wide band of foliated incised ornament forms a border that projects only a short distance on the ceiling. The east (rearward) edge of each of these panels has a wide flat border within which is a strip of incised ornament. Those borders extend fully

along the ceiling portion of each panel and then turn west in a right angle to join the east border of the next panel. Thus, these L-shaped borders frame both one side and the top edge of each panel. The borders each span about one quarter of the total panel width.

The panels are protected from aisle traffic by simple bright silvery metal railings composed of three narrow horizontal bars. The paired metal exit doors are in the first and third panels from the rear and are, as noted above, painted in geometric Art Deco floral patterns. The east border of each nearly identical panel bears a large molded glass indirect wall light composed of three diminishing tiers of V-shaped elements not unlike almost closed fans. There are three correspondingly placed identical indirect fixtures at each side of the balcony. All fourteen of these wall fixtures, as well as the eleven balcony soffit fixtures, can project light in three different colors.

The panels at each side nearest the proscenium differ markedly from the others, about 60% of each being grillwork opening into an organ chamber. Although the design varies from that of the other panels, the wall plane does not. As a Pflueger press release put it:

The side walls as they gently blend toward the stage . . . are not interrupted by the usual heavily ornamented protruding organ front. Instead, there is only a change in the character of the modeling and sculpture. The surface of the auditorium wall is uninterrupted.

Below the wide central section of each grille, a lobed exit archway leads to an upward-sloping curving passage with walls articulated by gilded reeded inset pilaster strips. The upper zone of each painted plaster wall section between them has gilded bas-relief ornament.

The grilles are tripartite, their wide centers flanked by narrow sections. The grille sections farthest from the stage are strictly geometrical, but the others contain a very formalized sprouting foliate motif. All sections are en-framed by ascending flat channeled stalks that curl and intertwine above the grilles in an interlacing swirl of frond-like volutes. Above that arched and looped "fountain line" motif, the remainder of each panel is like the other five on each wall.

There is, however, another major difference between this section nearest the stage and the other five sections. Whereas

the plasterwork of the other sections ends about one fifth of the way across the ceiling, in this sixth section the entire ceiling is plaster, making a vast proscenium motif beyond the actual proscenium arch. Thus, while the plasterwork of the other sections may be viewed as all wall and part ceiling, this section is conceived as a single unit that includes both splayed walls and the splayed slightly segmental ceiling vault. The ceiling forms a sounding board over the orchestra pit. Its large incised bas-relief central panel, a collaborative work of Ralph Stackpole and Robert Boardman Howard, represents a winged male nude flanked by two riderless horses, two eagles, and two nude horsemen above stylized clouds. At the upper (east) edge, a striated sky is filled with stars flanked by two comets.

The color of the plasterwork, achieved partly through the use of Dutch metal, variegated leaf, and aluminum leaf, ranged from deep copper to gold. A Pflueger press release described it as follows:

The entire surfaces of plaster on walls and ceilings have been finished in metal leaf -- the large sculptured bands being in gold, and the narrower bands in silver and deep variegated gold -- all glazed over to soften the entire effect so that the glaze lays [sic!] in the deep reveals, and the use of metal is sensed but not strongly felt.

The soffit of the actual proscenium opening is a slightly segmental arch of channeled aluminum "supported" by extruded aluminum "columns of light." Those quarter-cylindrical "columns" on a 5'-radius are constructed of vertical ogee-profiled metal strips about 50' high. The strips overlap but do not meet, thus allowing the "columns" to be lighted from within, giving a translucent effect. They appear simply to be fluted columnar elements when not lighted. B. J. S. Cahill described the effect thus:

The lights inside shine through the crevices and illuminate the extruded silver surfaces with a softly graduated glow impossible to distinguish at a little distance from actual translucence. And then as the colors are gradually changed the columns too seem to melt from shade to shade and strength to strength by some protean magic as bewildering as it is beautiful. (Architect and Engineer, March 1932)



The upper third of the proscenium opening is filled by the grand drape, a fixed orange valance trimmed in gold, silver, green, and blue, that duplicates the geometrically foliated original designed by Michael A. Goodman. The house curtain below the grand drape has the same color scheme and duplicates the original designed by Dorothy Liebes.

The plaster ceiling panels that continue the wall panels are, unlike the wall panels, all precisely identical in detail. Each has a floriated glass lighting fixture centered in it. The twelve fixtures are in the form of bulbous somewhat beet-shaped pendants and can, like the other fixtures, project light in three colors. Those panels flank the central three fifths of the five ceiling sections beyond the sounding board panel over the orchestra pit. The five central sections contain one of the most striking features of the auditorium, and its principal source of light, a "canopy of light" constructed like the one on the grand lobby. Above the grilles, a chamber about 8' high and 12' wider than the grilles conceals high wattage flood-lights whose light is reflected from the white ceiling through the grilles. The lights are amber, red, and blue and may be faded and mixed at will from the stage by a dimmer system. The reflecting chamber is also the main point of entry for the ventilating system.

The five grille sections are much more complex in pattern than those in the grand lobby. The design includes radial webs, grillages set at varying angles, swag-like banding, and chains of scrolls. Below a large floral motif centered at the east edge of each section, there is the figure of a girl suggested by the convolutions of the 12"-deep fins making up the grille. The effect of the "canopy of light" was described by Cahill as follows:

By a most intricate and lavish system of concealed red, yellow and blue bulbs all colors of the rainbow can be blended and turned on in succession: sheer glowing crimson to fleshy pink; dark night-sky blue through royal purple to the most delicate orchid, deep sea and spring bud green and every shade of jade. The whole threefold scheme of color works in unison and the variety of tones in which the whole theatre can be saturated is something rich and ravishing beyond words . . . The multitudinous modelings of the walls . . . are subordinated as ornament to the gorgeous chameleonic changes of color which literally drench the whole interior, and provide the principal source of pleasure to the public, next to the picture on the screen.

The seating in the auditorium provides one additional note of color through its upholstery, which duplicates the original green velours patterned with gold flowers and vines. The original Art Deco gilded metal aisle seat ends with their visor-like downlights have been reused, but some changes in the seating arrangement were made during the 1973 restoration. The last three rows at the rear of the orchestra level were eliminated to create standing room, and a railing for that area was designed to harmonize with the space. Seat rows are spaced farther apart, and the new seats are, on the average, wider than those they replaced.

There is evidence that this auditorium, with its suggestions of tropical vegetation, joyous figures in a state of nature, and the lone female figure in each section of the "canopy of light," a figure perhaps representing the bird-woman Rima, was inspired in part by W. H. Hudson's Green Mansions. In a telephone interview with Professor Michael A. Goodman, an "idea-man" during the designing phase, HABS Writer/Editor Lucy Pope Wheeler was told that Hudson's romantic fantasy was a source Goodman kept constantly on his desk during his work on the Paramount Theatre

7. Projection equipment: The original projection equipment was described as follows:

The angle of projection is 18°. The projection room is painted entirely in gray. Equipment includes three Simplex projectors on Western Electric Universal bases, with Ashcraft super-high intensity lamps; Western Electric sound apparatus; three high intensity spots and a flood by Hall & Connolly; one Brenkert F-7 effect machine; and one Chicago Cinema (Publix type) double dissolver. The screen is located 27 feet, 6 inches from the first row of seats. The maximum screen size possible is 28 x 50 feet. (Motion Picture Herald, March 12, 1932)

In addition to the principal room, the projection suite included the non-synchronous room, rewind room, battery room, rheostat room, generator room, and a lavatory. There were controls for the balcony fascia floodlights in the projection room.

8. Acoustics: As the Paramount was built well after the advent of sound pictures, acoustics were necessarily a primary consideration in its design. The deep recesses, box seats, and large ceiling domes that had become almost standard features of large theatres but were frequently

sources of acoustical problems were eliminated. Instead, the visual richness of the auditorium was confined to surface treatment on a starkly simple architectural framework. The auditorium interior is, in effect, a shell set within the structural box of the building, "thin enough in construction to resonate, yet of sound-absorbing material with heavily worked surfaces to prevent echoes and focussing of sound." The treatment of the plaster surfaces was described as "small scale roughness of all the surfaces" in conjunction with the "large scale smoothness of the interior shell." The resulting shape is an interior volume not unlike that of a nearly square splayed amplifying horn. The acoustical consultant for this very successful auditorium was Professor Vern O. Knudsen, University of California, Los Angeles.

Acoustics received immediate attention in the designing of the auditorium, the shape of which in general follows straight diverging lines, with width in close ratio to the depth (see plans). Auditorium surfaces are treated in overall sculptured plaster. In addition to these general acoustical preparations, the back walls are covered with Johns-Manville "Nashkoti" one inch in thickness. This is covered with canvas, which is pin-pricked for absorption, and painted. (It is stated by the architects that since it was set a week before opening, the volume has not been changed to meet variations in the size of audience.) (Motion Picture Herald, March 12, 1932)

9. Mechanical equipment: The locations of the compressor and refrigerating machinery, the contactor room, and the transformer vault have been noted above in the description of the basement floor plan. There was a switchboard in the basement telephone room near the men's lounge suite. Originally, there were two heating systems, but now all heating is by steam generated on the premises.

The auditorium, and also all of the public rooms, are air-conditioned by a plenum system incorporating both cooling and heating, with centrifugal, downward diffusion type equipment by Carrier. Heating for this system employs oil as fuel. For theatre offices, dressing rooms and other non-public divisions of the building, heating is by steam radiation, with the steam supplied by city mains -- an unusual provision possible in Oakland. (Motion Picture Herald, March 12, 1932)

Although the stage is not sufficiently deep for certain productions, e.g., grand opera, and the stage-left wings are shallow (only about 15'), the stage was and is fully equipped for live performances. (Over a mile of new rope was used to make the counterweights and adjustable lighting battens safe during the 1973 restoration.) The house lights as well as the stage lights can, of course, be controlled from backstage as well as from the projection room. "Included among the lighting facilities is three-color illumination in the auditorium, operating on a dimmer system. These facilities are incorporated in the general decorative scheme of the auditorium, . . . ." (Motion Picture Herald, March 12, 1932)

The orchestra pit is equipped with two Peter Clark lifts, a large one for the orchestra, and a small one south of it but fitted to it so as to be capable of making one large platform, for the organ console. On June 8, 1979, the U. S. Department of the Interior approved a Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service grant of \$40,000 "to restore and install" an organ to replace the missing original Wurlitzer instrument.

D. Site:

The Paramount Theatre is in the central business district of Oakland within a very accessible block. The box office is only "93 steps" from a Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) station, and there are about 2,300 parking spaces available nearby. The theatre faces east on Broadway, its 50'-wide entrance facade part way between 20th and 21st (formerly Hobart) streets. Telegraph Avenue, running at an oblique angle to the direction of Broadway, borders the rear of the theatre and a parking lot at the southwest corner of the block. The northeast corner of the block contains another parking lot. It is partially masked by a shoulder-high fence planted with shrubbery. The southeast portion of the block contains a one-story stucco-fronted shop (Roos-Atkins) adjacent to the entrance and grand lobby wing of the theatre, and a four-story I. Magnin store with a marble first story and green-stone-ashlar upper floors with Art Deco details. The store occupies the corner of Broadway and 20th Street and runs west to a passage or alley dividing its property from the southwest parking lot. The passage leads from a narrow exit court on the south flank of the auditorium to 20th Street. On 21st Street, west of the parking lot at the Broadway corner, there are a second theatre entrance (formerly an exit only) and, at the Telegraph Avenue corner, dressing-room and stage entrances. Between the entrances, an open exit court flanks the north side of the auditorium.

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#### PART 11.I. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of a Historic American Buildings Survey project to record selected representative examples of moving picture theatre design in the United States during the first third of the 20th century. Begun under the general supervision of James C. Massey, it was continued under Dr. John Poppeliers, succeeding Chief of the Survey. Seven HABS photographs by Robert C. Bernhardt of Oakland, California were taken in 1972. HABS Photographer Jack E. Boucher took nine additional photographs in 1975 and prepared archival photocopies of material lent by Milton T. Pflueger, AIA, including 13 photographs taken in 1932 by Gabriel Moulin Studios, San Francisco, and original plans by Miller & Pflueger. Extensive original research was done by HABS Writer/Editor Lucy Pope Wheeler, and Mrs. Wheeler prepared the initial text in consultation with A. Craig Morrison. HABS Architectural Historian Denys Peter Myers continued the research and wrote the revised final text based largely on Mrs. Wheeler's preliminary work.

ADDENDUM TO  
PARAMOUNT THEATER  
2025 Broadway  
Oakland  
Alameda County  
California

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